

Date: 21 June 2011

To: Program Review and Investigations Committee, Adolescent Health Care System

From: Daniel W. O'Neill, MD, Assistant Clinical Professor of Family Medicine, University of Connecticut School of Medicine, and Medical Director, CareNet Pregnancy Center of Northeast Connecticut.

Dear Committee Members,

I have been practicing medicine in Windham County for 13 years, where I serve adolescents affected by STDs and a relatively high rate of pregnancy. Killingly and Windham have been identified as two of 8 communities in Connecticut with high rates of teen pregnancy by the Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiative of the Department of Social Services in 2009.

In order to improve and promote adolescent health in these and other regions, I strongly support the following initiatives:

1. Abstinence-based sex education by both public schools and private organizations as a proven effective means of reducing rates of pregnancy and STD. The fatalistic pre-supposition by educators that "everyone is doing it" is not supported by the evidence that only 40% of adolescents in CT have ever had sex.¹ Since 87% of pregnancies among minors are unintended, and 26% of those not trying to become pregnant were using something to prevent it, CT has a way to go in this area of improved education.²
2. Access to early diagnosis of pregnancy, since 16% of minors experience late or no prenatal care, which puts them at higher risk of pregnancy complications and complications from abortions.³ Referral networks are often
3. Education on all options regarding teen pregnancy, and enforcement of CT abortion-specific informed consent laws, and the initiation of a **mandated waiting period** to allow women to be thoroughly informed before abortion decisions are made.
4. Enact **parental notification laws**, such as proposed bill 6246, which have been shown to reduce the rate of abortions among minors by 16%.⁴ In addition, the majority of teenage mothers are impregnated by adult men (2/3rds by fathers over 20 years of age, median age 22)⁵, so these laws would protect adolescence from undisclosed statutory rape. "One in five mothers aged 15-17 have a partner six or more years older. This type of age difference suggests, at the least, very different levels of life experience and

¹ Connecticut Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2009.

² Connecticut Pregnancy Risk Assessment Tracking System, April 2006.

³ Connecticut Pregnancy Risk Assessment Tracking System, April 2006.

⁴ New, Michael J., PhD. Center for Data Analysis Report #07-01, Feb 2007.

⁵ Males, M and K.S.Y. Chew "The Ages of Fathers in California Adolescent Birth, 1993" American Journal of Public Health 86(4), April, 1996.

power, and brings into question issues of pressure and abuse."⁶ 80% of national public polls favor these laws, and they are enacted in over 40 states.⁷ My minor patients cannot receive vaccines or get medications in public school without parental or guardian consent and piercings are illegal without parental consent in Connecticut (Statute 19a-92g), so there is a double standard in our statutes when it comes to abortion procedures. Parents are often responsible for medical bills for complications from abortions, not to mention the social and emotional effects of such a decision, and therefore should be involved to help guide their children in these important types of decision-making from the start. The US Supreme Court has repeatedly upheld the constitutionality of parental involvement laws, including judicial bypass provisions which allow exceptions in case of incest or potential family abuse. "There is little evidence in the limited decision-making literature reviewed to suggest that parental notification legislation does harm to a teenager or her family. If anything, such requirements might support family communication and facilitate decision-making."⁸ In the final analysis, the health of adolescent women will be enhanced with parental notification laws, so I urge the legislature to review and adopt the bill 6246 for the health of our state's adolescents and their families.

Sincerely,

Daniel W. O'Neill

Daniel W. O'Neill, MD

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⁶ Landry, David J. and Jacqueline Darroch Forrest, "How Old Are U.S. Fathers?" *Family Planning Perspectives*, vol. 27, no. 4 (July/August 1995)

⁷ CBS News, July, 2005.

⁸ Crosby, Margaret C. and Abigail English, "Mandatory parental involvement/judicial bypass laws: Do they promote adolescents' health?" *Journal of Adolescent Health* V 12, Issue 2, Pages 143-147, March 1991.

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